



State Secretary's  
Handbook  
(10/2012)

## **STATE SECRETARY HANDBOOK**

*Welcome to the Iowa Department of Agriculture & Land Stewardship! We are pleased to have you with us!*

*Your employment here will be a rewarding experience as we work together to protect our natural resources for future generations.*

This is intended to include most of the details of the secretarial responsibilities. It is not intended to be an official handbook nor is it intended to be a rigid guide since each Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) functions somewhat differently and separately.

This book offers you guidelines for duties you may undertake and suggestions for helping carry out those duties.

You will be performing tasks resulting from District, State, and Federal programs. This book will address mostly those duties associated with District and State (Iowa Department of Agriculture and Land Stewardship-Division of Soil Conservation) (IDALS-DSC) programs, but also some references to USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) programs. The NRCS District Conservationist (DC) and the NRCS Area Administrative Management Assistant (AMA) may be consulted for NRCS programs.

Administration of the SWCD is a big job – not only important, but complex. Since your position gives you access to the various sources of information, you can be the nucleus of your SWCD: the person who receives and provides information to the commissioners, agency personnel, and the general public. The more YOU know about your SWCD and its various programs, the better the assistance you can offer. For this reason, you should become familiar with the Policies and Procedures Manual (P & P) [www.iowaagdata.com](http://www.iowaagdata.com), the SWCD Commissioner Handbook <http://www.cdiowa.org/resources.html>, and your SWCD's Policies and Procedures.

While employed as a State secretary, your employment, supervision, and duties are the responsibility of the IDALS-DSC Field Representative, meaning that the State Secretary is an employee of the State and the Field Representative is responsible for outlining the duties and *may* work with the District Conservationist to develop a Performance Plan which will meet the needs of the field office.

District offices are unique in staff size, in the programs that are utilized, and the workload. Each government entity – federal, state, district – has various programs they offer. Some programs may not be applicable to your district or of a high priority so secretarial duties will vary. Because of the unique partnership in a district office, it is important that all staff feel they are part of a team effort, regardless of whether they are a federal, state, or district employee. The office works together to accomplish the same goal of putting conservation on the ground of which you are the central force.

Duties will vary from office-to-office, depending on time of year and work load. If you ever have questions regarding programs, roles, responsibilities, etc., please contact your Field Representative. The following information is provided as guidance for your use.

## **Secretary Roles and Responsibilities**

The Position Description Questionnaire (PDQ) and the Individual Performance Plan and Evaluation (PPE) system will help you achieve maximum success as Secretary. The PDQ is used to describe your job responsibilities assigned for your district and the PPE will state your expectations in performing the assigned responsibilities. Your IDALS-DSC Field Representative will work with you to complete these. Go to

[http://das.hre.iowa.gov/documents/MS\\_manual/552-0094\\_position\\_description\\_questionnaire.dot](http://das.hre.iowa.gov/documents/MS_manual/552-0094_position_description_questionnaire.dot) for an example of the PDQ and [http://das.hre.iowa.gov/documents/edpd/552-0674\\_performance\\_eval\\_form.dot](http://das.hre.iowa.gov/documents/edpd/552-0674_performance_eval_form.dot) for a sample PPE.

## **Agency Understanding**

The following link will connect you with the “DSC Overview” which will highlight the Division of Soil Conservation, conservation partners, and programs. This PowerPoint should be viewed in “slide show” format for the hyperlinks to be active.

<http://www.iowaagriculture.gov/soil/pdf/DSCIntroPPT.pdf>

## **Policies and Procedures (P and P) Manual**

The State secretary is an employee of the State of Iowa – IDALS-DSC, and is under its auspices. If the State Secretary is appointed as the secretary for the SWCD, he/she will work jointly with the SWCD Commissioners and the NRCS as agreed to in the Mutual Agreement that was signed when the SWCD was organized and staffed, and also under the guidelines of the Revised Cooperative Working agreement.

This handbook has been written to keep you as informed as possible in certain procedures and matters that play an important part in your role as Secretary. The more you know about your District and the various programs, the better assistance you can offer. All procedures pertaining to the Division of Soil Conservation are located in the Policies and Procedures Manual. You can access the most recent version online at <http://www.iowaagdata.com> and/or you may elect to maintain a hard copy of the manual in your work area.

Below are some subjects that you may deal with on a day-to-day basis. You can view these at the following link: <http://www.iowaagdata.com>

Acronyms

Annual Reports

Annual Work Plans and Resource Management Plans

Award Programs

Budgets – Commissioner Expenses

Commissioner Meeting Minutes

Contracts, Cooperative Working Agreement – Memorandums of Understanding

District Employee – Responsibility and Payroll

Easements/Group Planning Requests (Coming soon!)

Elections

Employee Benefits

Entities – Power of Attorney

FARMS

Forms

Fundraisers  
Maintenance Agreements  
Notary  
Programs – Funding Sources  
Signature Cards – District Bank Account (Coming Soon!)  
Slough Bill  
Soil Loss Complaints  
Timesheets and Work Hours  
Severe Weather Provisions Policies

## **Programs**

As a secretary, you will work with many agencies which provide assistance to landowners to help them conserve the natural resources on their land. The following is a list of the most commonly used programs and the agency responsible for them:

(**DSC** – Division of Soil Conservation; **FSA** – Farm Service Agency; **NRCS** – Natural Resources Conservation Service;  
**DNR** – Iowa Department of Natural Resources; **SWCD** – Soil and Water Conservation District; **FWS** – Fish and Wildlife Service)

Abandoned Mine Land Reclamation - DSC  
Ag Drainage Well Closure - DSC  
Coal Mining - DSC  
Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP) - DSC  
Conservation Reserve Program (CRP) - FSA  
Conservation Stewardship Program (CSP) - NRCS  
District Initiative - DSC  
Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) - NRCS  
Farm Pond Program - DNR  
Fish Habitat Restoration - DNR  
Grassland reserve program (GRP) - NRCS  
Integrated Farm and livestock management - DSC  
Iowa Financial Incentives cost-share (IFIP) - DSC  
Local option sales tax (LOST) - SWCD  
Low-Interest Loans for non-point source practices - DNR  
Minerals Mining - DSC  
No-Interest Loans for conservation practices - DSC  
On-site wastewater assistance fund - DNR  
Publicly owned lake (POL) cost-share - DSC  
Resource enhancement and protection (REAP) Forestry/Native Grasses - DSC  
REAP water quality protection practices - DSC  
REAP water quality protection projects - DSC  
Small wetlands program - FWS  
State revolving fund (SRF) low-interest loans for water quality projects - DSC  
Watershed improvement program - DNR  
Watershed improvement review board (WIRB) – Governor's Office, DSC  
Watershed protection program (WSPF) - DSC  
Wetlands reserve program (WRP) - NRCS  
Wildlife habitat incentive program (WHIP) - NRCS  
Women, Land and Legacy (WLL) - NRCS

For additional DSC related programs, check the Table of Contents in the P and P Manual, [www.iowaagdata.com](http://www.iowaagdata.com).

For SWCD sponsored programs, contact your SWCD Chairperson and District Conservationist.

For NRCS, FSA, DNR, and FWS related programs, contact your District Conservationist and Area Office Staff.

### **Misc. Information and Hints to Assist you in your position**

#### **SWCD Commissioners and district employees**

For more information regarding SWCD commissioners go to [www.cdiowa.org/resources.html](http://www.cdiowa.org/resources.html) and click on “Commissioner Handbook” to read about their powers and duties. For guidance for a district employee (if you have one), go to [www.cdiowa.org/resources.html](http://www.cdiowa.org/resources.html) and click on “Employee Handbook for Districts” and “Employer Handbook” for help with writing your own handbook.

#### **Accident Reporting and Worker’s Compensation**

State Employees must report their individual work place injuries as soon as possible to the IDALS Personnel Bureau, Wallace Building, Des Moines, Iowa 50319, phone (515) 281-5693 or fax (515) 281-8503. Failure to do so in a timely fashion could invalidate any future claims if the injury persists or any reimbursements if you fail to secure prior approval for any services rendered (i.e. prescriptions, treatments, etc.). The Personnel Bureau will assist you in completing the “Worker’s Compensation – First Report of Injury or Illness”. If needed, they will direct you to the nearest Worker’s Compensation doctor. Then, as soon as practical, notify your Field Representative.

In case of an emergency, you should get treatment first and then take care of the paperwork as soon as possible. If the injury happens before or after normal office hours (8:00 am – 4:30 pm) you should seek treatment first and take care of any necessary paperwork as soon as possible.

#### **Ag Info/Education**

Field visits are for informational purposes and provide an opportunity to learn about conservation practices and how they are applied. Field visits provide an understanding of what the technicians are doing in the field working with producers. Field events may also be hosted by DSC, SWCDs, DNR, NRCS, or Iowa State University (ISU) Extension and may include Research and Demonstration Farms and Iowa Learning Farms. Prior approval from your Field Representative is required to attend.

#### **Entity Signature and Authorization Signature Requirements**

You may work with customers who have their farming operation under a Corporation, Partnership, Limited Liability Company, Trust, Estate, or other entity. Your main duty will be to make sure you identify who has the authority to sign for the entity. If you are ever in doubt of who can sign, contact your Field Representative or appropriate program personnel.

#### **Meetings**

An assortment of meetings may be planned by DSC and/or the NRCS area office.

- Shared Management Units and individual offices may have monthly staff meetings.
- Meetings hosted by DSC/NRCS may break out between job class to discuss items pertinent to secretaries, technicians, etc.

- Meetings are held in each Conservation Districts of Iowa (CDI) region for the district commissioners and assistants in the spring and possibly the fall. The regional meetings are an opportunity for commissioners and assistants to discuss issues of mutual interest, hear updates on topics from CDI and our partners. Your CDI Regional Director will assist the SWCD hosting the regional meeting.
- The fall annual conference is co-sponsored by CDI and the State Soil Conservation Committee (SSCC) in cooperation with DSC and NRCS. This conference allows commissioners and assistants to get together to discuss issues. It provides educational opportunities on various topics and includes the annual business meeting. Resolutions are discussed, officers are elected, and awards are presented as well.

### **Personal Safety**

- Employees are expected to use safety equipment provided as needed. Established rules of conduct and rules of safety shall be observed.
- The joint cooperation of all employees in the observance of this policy will provide safe working conditions and accident-free performance to our mutual advantage.
- Safety information is available from the Iowa Department of Workforce Development: <http://www.iowaworkforce.org/labor/iosh/index.html> .

### **Public Relations – News Releases**

News releases are generally written by staff or commissioners, but secretaries may write them as well. The news release shall be reviewed by your Field Representative, District Conservationist, or Commissioners before submitting it to the media.

You will receive news releases from DSC, CDI, and NRCS. These should be routed to Commissioners and other staff members as appropriate and should be submitted to your local media as necessary.

### **Whistleblower**

A whistleblower discloses information that someone believes violates a law or witnesses abuse of authority, a gross mismanagement, endangerment of someone's health and safety, or a waste of funds. Any of these concerns need to be reported to the appropriate USDA personnel immediately to address the concern, confidentiality, and due process.

### **Training and Development**

The proper training will make it easier for you to get started correctly. It will help promote a greater degree of acceptance by fellow employees, a higher level of morale, efficiency and productivity and will contribute to improved communications.

The following outline can be used as a checklist for your training needs. Each field representative, district conservationist, and district chairperson may have other items to add to this list.

Let's get started!

## **Development and Mentoring Module**

### **1. First Day –**

- a. Field Representative (Supervisor) greets them at the door.
  - i. Overview of PDQ Personal Development Plan
  - ii. Contact Information
    - 1. Mentor, DSC, NRCS – DC, Area Office
- b. Introduction to office coworkers
- c. Security access
  - i. Building
  - ii. Computer / online
- d. Telephone procedures –
  - i. Answering, transfer, access, - DC
- e. Presentation of the "DSC Overview" PowerPoint by the Field Rep
  - i. History of Soil and Water Conservation Districts
  - ii. Identification of Conservation Partners
  - iii. Overview of programs
- f. Human Resources Paperwork
  - i. IDALS HR, followed up by Field Rep.
- g. Policies and Procedures Manual – Field Rep.
  - i. General Overview
  - ii. Access – electronic and hard copy
- h. Work schedule and timesheets – Field Rep.
  - i. Reporting

### **2. First Week**

- a. Mentor arrives 2nd day and introduces self
- b. P and P Manual – Mentor
  - i. Electronic access and hard copy
    - 1. Application and purpose
- c. District Operations
  - i. SWCD Meeting information and procedures – Mentor, SWCD Chair
  - ii. Commissioner Expenses / guidelines – Mentor, Field Rep.
- d. Correspondence Procedures (ongoing) – DC, Mentor, Field Rep.
  - i. Incoming / outgoing mail

- ii. Formal and informal
      - 1. Composing and drafting
        - a. Letters
        - b. Reports
  - e. Visit DSC Central Office – Field Rep.
    - i. Central Office Staff introductions
    - ii. Meet IDALS staff
      - 1. Ag Secretary
      - 2. Accounting
      - 3. IDALS HR
        - a. State Employee Benefits overview
    - iii. FARMS training – Field Services Bureau
    - iv. Miscellaneous and other programs – Field Services Bureau
  - f. AMA visit and introduction
    - i. Finalize all NRCS paperwork
    - ii. Procurement of supplies, purchases, and vehicle maintenance
    - iii. NRCS Records Management
    - iv. Personal Identifiable Information (PII)
  - g. Training – Mentor
3. First Month
  - a. Outlook accessibility – Mentor, DC and AMA
  - b. AgLearn - AMA
  - c. Files - Mentor - Office Staff
    - i. Customer / Producer
    - ii. NRCS Program Files
  - d. Records Management – AMA, Mentor
    - i. Information from DSC, NRCS, NACD, CDI, SWCD
  - e. Entity Signature Authority – NRCS Area Program Specialist, Field Rep,
  - f. P and P Manual – Mentor, Field Rep
  - g. Submit State Employee Required Paperwork to IDALS HR
  - h. SWCD – Chair and Commissioners, Mentor
    - i. Bookkeeping
    - ii. Signature Authority
      - 1. Bank account



- iii. Fundraisers and other activities
  - iv. Meetings
  - v. State Cost Share
    - 1. Rankings
    - 2. Priorities
    - 3. Reimbursement Rates
  - vi. Identify and maintain District website needs
- i. Employee / Mentor process development – Field Rep.
  - i. Evaluate and adjust accordingly
- 4. 90 Days
  - a. Supervisory review with employee – Field Rep, DC, SWCD Chairperson
- 5. 150 Days
  - a. Supervisor performs probationary Personal Performance Evaluation. – Field Rep.
  - b. Develop Personal Performance Evaluation – Field Rep.
  - c. Develops subsequent performance period's Individual Development Plan. – Field Rep
- 6. 1 year
  - a. Continued evaluation and communication. – Secretary and Field Rep.

### **Summary Statement**

Even though this is not everything you will do in your position, it is designed to help guide and assist you. Remember to utilize your Mentor, Field Rep, DC and AMA. Please feel free to contact them if you don't quite understand something. As partners, we are all here to help you with your training needs.